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RUSSIA'S FLEET.

BY ARCHIBALD S. HURD.

IT is common knowledge that Russia's fleet of late years has been greatly strengthened; but it is doubtful if the full significance of the developments of the last twenty years, and especially the past five years, has been fully understood even in England and America. Japan has had her eyes open to the trend of events, and step by step she has endeavored to checkmate the Muscovite Power. Only this spring, on the announcement of a new Russian ship-building programme, all parties in Japan buried their differences and agreed to the expenditure of £11,500,000 on new ships of war! It looks as though the future would witness a duel between Russia and Japan for the supremacy of the Far Eastern Seas; but if the issue can be decided without recourse to force, by the gentle and insidious arts of diplomacy, Russia will not fight, because fighting is expensive and she needs all her resources for developing her vast Eastern and Western Empires. But Russian policy has dictated the provision of the wherewithal to fight if the wiles of peaceful negotiation fail to accomplish her ends.

In the world to-day, there is no more remarkable and significant movement than the haste which is being shown in strengthening the naval forces of the Tzar. Born in England, cradled by English hands, that fleet has lately received accessions from some of the chief shipyards of the world, so greatly have Russia's political dreams outrun the industrial means by which to give them substance. For five years past, the United States, England, France, and Germany have been busy building ships, which, in consequence of her haste for power, the resources of Russian ship-building establishments could not construct. Such world-wide activity at the bidding of one single ambitious government,

which knows what it wants and the instruments which it needs to accomplish its purpose, is unparalleled. With daring audacity, which has passed almost without comment, she has called upon the friends of the "open door" in the Far East to help forge the weapons, which she, the opponent of the "open door," will use against them if they hinder her. By every means in her control, Russia has built up and is building up a great fleet, and the striking fact in this expansion is that her navy is not concentrated, as ten years ago was the case, in the Baltic and the Black Sea, but is massed largely at the new sea outlets of the huge dominions of the Tzar, Port Arthur and Vladivostock.

It was regarded as a truism some years ago that Russia needed no navy, and could not afford one if she did, owing to the immense capital expenditure which was necessary for the development of her territories. She had a small navy, but Europe, remembering its genesis, refused to regard it seriously. It was remembered that Peter the Great had visited England and watched the ship-building in progress at Deptford, had gained an insight into the methods of the craft, and had taken back with him to his dominions a small army of artisans and sailors to lay the foundations of a fleet, intended as a protection, not against either of the Great Powers, but against Sweden. Much has happened since then; but this is the story of the birth of the navy of a country which is impregnable against attack by sea, and, if we may judge from Napoleon's experience, not easily touched vitally by land. Ashore and afloat, Russia has had a general and an admiral who has never been really defeated, General Winter and Admiral Winter, one and the same. Her coast-line is icebound throughout most of the months of the year; and, apart from the danger from Sweden, her near neighbor, Peter the Great feared no foe at sea. But this neighbor needed to have the fear of the Muscovite put into his heart; and so the Russian fleet, under the fostering care of English shipwrights and sailors, came into being. It was a defensive force, and, throughout most of the year, it was frozen into the Baltic, inert and useless.

Subsequently there came a new development. By the Treaty of Kainardji in 1774, the Russians obtained the right to trade in the Black Sea, and in this instance the flag followed the trade; and gradually Russia created a Euxine force to defend her commercial and territorial interests. When the Crimean War closed

and the Treaty of Paris specified that the Euxine should be open to the trade of all the world, but shut to ships of war, it looked as though Russia's dreams of ascendancy in these waters had been buried. But Russia was merely biding her time; and, in 1870, when there was no one at liberty specially concerned to say her nay, she brushed aside this provision. The world's diplomatists met in London and decided that the neutralization of the sea should be abrogated; but, in order to leave Turkey and Russia in its sole enjoyment with as little danger to the general peace as possible, it was agreed that the Dardanelles and Bosphorus should be closed to ships of war, thus completely isolating the fleets of the two Powers in these waters. In this manner Russia has become mistress of the Black Sea, and it is but a few months since she felt the pulse of Europe by sending on two occasions torpedo-boats through the Dardanelles. In resorting to this action, Russia bore in mind Lord Salisbury's admission that, at the time of the Crimean War, England "put her money on the wrong horse." The Tzar's advisers know full well that, when the fitting time comes, the ships in the Black Sea will pass through the Dardanelles into the Mediterranean with absolute freedom. In the Black Sea she has accomplished her purpose and knows it and is content, and Europe knows that she has achieved her object and that, when she cares to tear up the last fragment of the Treaty of Paris, no one will do more than protest. She will choose an opportunity when rivals are too busy to interfere.

Throughout these many years of growing power in the Baltic and the Black Sea, the Russian navy continued to attract large numbers of English officers, and the fame of Admirals Elphinstone and Greig in particular will not soon be forgotten. But the feature of the Russian fleet since the introduction of steam and steel was, that the ships were largely of the coast-defence type, that they were unfitted for action far from a base. They were designed to operate in the Baltic and the Black Sea, to give protection against the Northern Powers of Europe and to overawe Turkey, but not a ship bearing the Russian ensign cruised in far-off waters where the Union Jack and the Tricolor, to a less extent, were seen. In all these years, Russia remained at her own doors, ready to defend them, with no weapons for offensive war afloat.

In the early nineties, Russian policy began to turn eastward. What Bismarck did for the German Empire, Russia decided she

would do for her vast Eastern and Western Empires—bind them together by a great intercontinental railway, connecting Moscow with Vladivostock. Time alone could show Europe the fresh dreams which this scheme cloaked, and time did show. With immense energy the task of laying the rails for nearly five thousand miles was taken in hand in sections, and the world applauded the project, holding that such a trunk line from Europe through Asia would be in the highest interest of civilization. England, of course, had a suspicion that this great railway development brought Russia nearer India and Persia, but she was alone. Japan was only slowly emerging out of a barbarian state; Germany was still without definite aims in the Far East; and the United States, with slight commercial attachments in the Eastern Seas and a determination not to be drawn into the vortex of the quarrels of European Powers, was comparatively unconcerned. Russia was encouraged in her task, and its accomplishment was hastened with all speed. The Fates conspired in her favor, and China began to attract the attention of the world. It had been intended to take the railway only to the Chinese frontier, and Russia then purposed sitting quietly until a chance arrived of driving on down to the warm water, and thus accomplishing her desire to find a back door free from ice. The way was paved by diplomacy, and the world only slowly realized that the Muscovite Power was becoming the dominant factor in China. Russia showed her hand in 1895, when she objected to the Shimonoseki treaty which was being negotiated between Japan and China on the termination of hostilities, and she robbed the victor of the spoils of war—the province of Manchuria. Soon afterwards, the world expressed itself as amazed at the definite seizure of Port Arthur and the arrangement with China for carrying through the railway from Moscow to the long-desired back door of Russia. From a European Power, with a great army and a defensive navy, Russia became a Power in the Far East, with a base for her fleet and a jumping-off place for any further enterprises. England might protest, but the deed was done, and the work of laying the railway to the sea was immediately pushed on with feverish haste, for such a line has a high strategic value. The task was well forward, when China again blindly played into the hands of Russia by failing to crush the anti-foreign movement, which, judging by results, might be styled pro-Russian, for it gave that Power an

opportunity to tighten its hold on Manchuria, nominally for the protection of its railway. Of course, when the clouds for the time dispersed, Russia seconded the efforts of the other Powers to withdraw from China, and promised that she would hand back Manchuria to its rightful owners. The promise was accepted in good faith, and her allies brought home their troops and many of their ships of war, but Russia remained in Manchuria in full force. Dr. Morrison, writing recently to "The Times" after spending two months in this province, said:

"Russia has transformed Manchuria from a Chinese possession to a virtually Russian province. I saw the Russian city of Harbin upheaved bodily in the most fertile plain in the heart of Manchuria, and saw the thousands of solid buildings for permanent Russian occupation being built simultaneously by armies of Chinese workmen along the entire length of the railway. From the western frontier to Harbin is 605 miles, from Harbin to the eastern frontier 335 miles, from Harbin to Port Arthur 615 miles. So cleverly has the railway been traced, that there is not one important roadway in Manchuria which it does not command. In every case, evacuation means the removal of Russian troops to a point from which the city evacuated can be struck immediately and without resistance. Manchuria is absolutely dominated by Russia. All the officials are absolutely in her power."

In this wise has Russia made firm her grip on this slice of China; and, if she evacuates, her soldiers will still remain to guard the railway, which, in the opinion of Dr. Morrison, means that "she will be stronger after she has fulfilled to the letter her pledges of evacuation than she was before." Evidently, judging from more recent events, Russia does not entirely hold with this view, and her disposition is not to act in accordance with her pledges if a plausible excuse for their repudiation can be found, when England and the United States are occupied elsewhere and the opportunity is otherwise favorable for consummating her work in China by the final and avowed seizure of Manchuria, to the exclusion of the commerce of other Powers.

One can but marvel at the cleverness with which this work of Russifying a whole Chinese province—a territory larger than either Germany, France, or Austria-Hungary, and twice the size of Italy, with a population of 21,000,000 and immense undeveloped resources, especially timber and minerals (including gold and silver and coal), representing wealth beyond the dreams of

avarice,—has been accomplished. Russia has conquered this desirable land without striking a blow, and at the same time has found time to tighten her grasp on Turkey, to spread her influence in the Persian Gulf and to feel her way surely but cautiously along the frontier of British India. Protests she has met with cool reliance on time to efface the newness of her footsteps, and she has never been disappointed.

Her policy in the Far East has been calculated to a nicety; every movement has been planned with care and circumspection, and every provision that forethought could suggest has been made in advance. Assured of her impregnability in Europe against a vital blow though the navies of the world combined in arms against her, Russia foresaw four years ago that in the Far East she would have to secure a naval supremacy if she were to carry out her policy. To overawe China with visible evidence of her power afloat was her aim; while, by means of her strategic railway, she would be able to demonstrate her ability to pour in troops from Europe. At the same time she needed a fleet to keep Japan, newly awakened to her future, in check. Ten years ago, as a naval Power in Far Eastern waters, Russia was an inconsiderable factor, and the British squadron had no serious rival. To-day, no fleet, if even the British and Japanese squadrons in the Far East combined, equals hers. It is on this foundation of a great fleet that the policy of Russia rests.

A navy cannot be improvised in a day or a month; an army of a kind can be readily raised and drilled into some order. For the past ten years, Russia has been acting on this truism of defence. Prior to the war between China and Japan, her naval expenditure had been slowly increased from year to year, but it was not until 1897 that she realized the full responsibility of her expansion in the Far East. It was in that year that the Tzar gave his sanction to a great naval programme, which was to be put in hand at once and pressed on with in all haste. With her own resources, even if she continued as in the past to draw on England for a portion of her machinery, she could not hope to build the new fleet in time to serve her purpose, and it was resolved to call in the aid of the other countries. In a few months, Englishmen, Americans, Germans, and of course Frenchmen, were busily engaged in the construction of war-ships for the Russian navy. The programme was spread over seven years and included the construction of

eight first-class battle-ships, six large cruisers, ten smaller cruisers, twenty torpedo-boat destroyers, thirty torpedo boats, one submarine mine transport, one torpedo transport. One battle-ship and one cruiser were assigned to Cramps at Philadelphia, one battle-ship and two cruisers went to French yards, two cruisers were placed in Germany, while England received an order for a torpedo-boat destroyer.

With all speed the programme was put in hand and at once the naval expenditure leaped up at an astonishing rate. This fact may be appreciated from the following figures taken from the published Russian statements of naval expenditure, but they do not represent the full increase, because, apart from the sums included in the naval budget, large sums are spent from various sources which do not appear for the world's eyes to scan:

1887-9,	£3,500,000	was the average sum spent;
1890,	£4,234,000,	rising to £6,102,000 in 1895;
1896,	£6,388,000,	rising to £7,089,000 in 1898;
1900,	£9,121,000	rising to £10,815,000 in 1902.

The true significance of this augmentation in the expenditure on the fleet, marking a greater percentage than any other European navy since 1889, can be fully appreciated only if it is remembered that each new ship, as it has been completed, has been despatched to the Far East, that upwards of about one hundred millions, sterling, have been expended on the railway communications, while immense sums have been laid out in developing and fortifying Vladivostock and Port Arthur. Not for a moment has the policy of Russia waited for money, for the countries which have been building the ships have also been lending vast sums to carry on the policy of Eastern expansion.

In feverish haste Russia has practically completed her great naval programme; and last summer she was able to send as reinforcements for her squadron in the Far East no fewer than two of the new first-class battle-ships, and four cruisers. The naval force in Eastern seas has been increased year by year as the new men-of-war have been completed, with the result that Russia now has in those waters, six battle-ships, two large armored gunboats, twelve cruisers, including four armored, a large torpedo flotilla, three sloops, three torpedo gunboats, two torpedo vessels, two mining transports, and several small special-service ships. This

is the formidable force already in these Far Eastern waters, ready to support the action of Russian diplomatists at every turn, and fresh reinforcements are frequently despatched. Russia's dreams are of the East, and she has had no ships for some years past to spare for the increase of her fleet in the West. Her present naval expenditure amounts to a charge equal to £15 13s 9d on every ton of her shipping, a sufficient indication that her navy has not been built, even in part, to protect her mercantile marine.

The policy of expansion which has been worked out with as little commotion as possible in the past few years, is apparently nearing completion; and, by the time Russia throws off all reserve, she will have secured her position in the Far East so well that any attempt to hinder her will only be possible at the cost of a terrible war; it cannot be doubted that, after so great a financial sacrifice, Russia will not permit herself to be deprived of her spoils. She is in China, and there she will remain, mistress of Manchuria, mistress of the neighboring waters, and the dominant military Power also in this section of China, since her railway will enable her to pour troops into the peninsula at the shortest notice, to reinforce the huge garrison which has been quartered there for years past, housed in new permanent barracks.

The growth in the naval armaments of Russia can be illustrated with sufficient accuracy by taking the number of battle-ships ten years ago, with their displacement, and we thus get the following comparison:

	1893 No.	Tons	1903 No.	Tons
Battle - ships	15	133,000	21	230,700
Large Cruisers	10	63,400	15	116,300

This increase has been achieved in spite of the process of weeding out old ships which has been in progress in these ten years; all the battle-ships in the navy now, except one small one, are less than twenty-five years old, and only two of the cruisers exceed that age; whereas, ten years ago, anything that could float was good enough to be counted a man-of-war, battle-ship or cruiser as the case might be. Now a nicer discrimination is shown, and yet Russia is able to claim a great advance; in fact her strength in big ships has been almost doubled, and the process of augmenting her forces is still being energetically pressed forward. Including only the ships which were actually in hand on

January 1st of this year, and casting forward to the date of their completion, it appears that on January 1st, 1907, after eliminating all vessels more than twenty-five years old, her fleet will comprise 25 battle-ships of 302,900 tons, and 14 large cruisers of 110,100 tons.

In this connection, it may be interesting to append some comparative figures, showing the numerical strength (with total displacement in parentheses) of the other great navies at the same date, 1907, apart from any new ships which it may have been decided to lay down since January 1st last, none of which can, however, be at sea under ordinary circumstances by the beginning of 1907:

	Great Britain	France	Germany
Battle - ships	54 (749,300)	31 (344,900)	19 (213,000)
Large Cruisers.....	76 (681,800)	30 (255,500)	11 (82,100)

	United States	Italy	Japan
Battle - ships	21 (260,500)	14 (171,800)	6 (86,500)
Large Cruisers.....	16 (181,200)	5 (35,300)	6 (59,000)

These figures are taken from the recently published "*Taschenbuch der Kriegsflotten*," and may be regarded not only as generally accurate, but free from that form of special pleading to which even statistics are liable in biassed hands.

Even now, the Russian government is not satisfied with its naval strength; and in the present year it has been decided that, as the 1898 programme has been practically completed, another programme shall be put in hand forthwith. This scheme includes six battle-ships, larger and with a much greater radius of action than any which have been built hitherto. As Russia's need for ships in the Far East has grown, she has recognized the disabilities of the ships with which she was satisfied ten or fifteen years ago, ships of small displacement with little coal and small room for ammunition and stores; and every ship which is now ordered is designed to be as self-supporting as any ship of war can be. The new battle-ships, consequently, are to displace 16,000 tons. All Russian ships are well designed down to the minutest detail; they have good speed and are more heavily armed than the vessels of most navies. Moreover, they are well kept in all details, as is evident from the most cursory glance between decks.

Thanks to her conscriptive system, Russia has no difficulty in

finding men, but the demands of late years have outrun the supply in her maritime provinces. In ten years her personnel, now standing at 62,000, has been nearly doubled. She has been compelled to go inland, with the result that to-day her fleet is manned to some extent by agricultural laborers and other landsmen with no liking for or familiarity with the sea. It remains to be seen how these men develop during their five to seven years' training, but of their comrades from the maritime districts it is sufficient to say that Napoleon thought highly of the qualities of Russian sailors drawn from the sea coast. The conditions of war have changed in the past hundred years, it is true. The battles of Nelson's day were, to some extent, sailors' battles, while those of to-morrow will be admirals' battles in a large degree. Still, it is the sailors who feed, aim, and fire the guns; and it is the guns which deal the blows at an enemy. No one who knows the Russian naval officer doubts his courage and capacity, and his men are as children, savage but obedient children, with a wild zest for the excitement of war.

Is it not true that the development of the Russian navy along the lines indicated is one of the most significant movements of the past few years? It has really been accomplished without seriously offending any one, for even in England to-day, where trade is said to govern policy, there are those who urge that there need be no cause of quarrel between the two countries.

In ten years Russia has concentrated her attention on Turkey and the Balkans, on Persia and on the Far East. She sits ever watching the absorption of the other Powers in this or that enterprise or quarrel, and seizes the right moment to pull one or two of the strings. In face of Turkey, decrepit and bankrupt, she has had no need for a greatly increased navy in the Black Sea; and thus it has come about that she has merely maintained at reasonable strength her European squadrons, with an eye on Germany, while she has massed her new ships in the Far East, and poured out millions of money in developing her new bases, Vladivostock and Port Arthur, making firm the foundation of her ascendancy in China. It has cost her already more than the South-African war cost Great Britain, but she has been able to meet the strain and believes that the future will amply recompense her.

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